

LAND REFORM FAILURES

in

Communist North Vietnam

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Among the causes of the recent peasant uprisings in Nghe-An Province and elsewhere throughout North Viet-Nam, the Viet-Cong communist Government has admitted that partial responsibility was due to « mistakes » in the land reform programme.

This admission of failure helps to explain the miserable conditions of life in which our northern compatriots are forced to live. But no explanation can possibly excuse either the communist form of government or the crimes of its leaders against the people.

The Viet-Cong, like other communists elsewhere in Asia and Europe, promised the people independence, freedom from tyranny, and higher standards of living. Instead there has been a harvest of terror, hunger and death.

Ninety per cent of the people in North Viet-Nam as elsewhere in Asia are farmers, so that land reform is the first and most essential economic problem to be solved by any new Asian nation. The communists have boasted that their solution is the best. But the chief result of their false and broken promises has been one miserable failure after another ending in a country-wide peasant revolt which has had to be ruthlessly suppressed by armed force.

Collective Farms.

Like the leaders of Red China and North Korea, the Viet-Cong have concealed from the people that the ultimate goal of communist land reform is « collectivization, » or slave labour on government-owned farms. Instead they have promised to every farmer that he will become the sole owner of the land he tills.

This false promise of « Land to the Tiller » is the true goal only of really democratic land reform programmes in Japan, India, the Philippines and other non-communist nations of Asia with which the Free Republic of South Viet-Nam proudly associates itself.

The communists have stolen this democratic slogan in the hope of seducing the simple and honest hard-working farmer who knows nothing about Marxist theory or the actual fate of collectivized farmers in Soviet Russia. In Red China, where far less than half the farmers owned the land they tilled, this false promise had greater appeal than in North Viet-Nam, where 98.7 per cent of the *total farm land was tilled by the owners!* *

* As compared with 90 and 64.5 per cent respectively in Central and in South Viet-Nam. Land reform in the South is being effected by the Government of President Ngo-Dinh-Diem by the expropriation of land after complete remuneration to the landlords — not by confiscation without payment.

Government-owned collective farming has no connection with the collective ownership of land which, as a form of democratic social welfare, has been practiced for centuries in Indochina. Under collective ownership, individual communities own part of the land constituting their territory. People deprived of rice-fields turn for support to the communal lands.

Why then did the Viet-Cong follow the example of Red China and North Korea in this temporary departure from practice in the Soviet Union, whose leaders boast that private ownership of land was « abolished for ever » ?

The answer to this significant question lies first of all in the fact that it was easy for the Viet-Cong communists to promise something that was already accomplished, since most of the land was already owned by the tillers anyway.

Secondly, the Vietnamese farmer like most peasants elsewhere is strongly attached to the land he tills, whether he owns it or not ; so the communists naturally had no intention to begin by jeopardizing their position, which was based upon false promises of freedom, independence and higher standards of living.

Thirdly, by promising land ownership to the small number of tenants and hired hands, the communists knew they could stir up natural discontent and breed hatred against the rich peasants and large landowners. These large landowners could then be tried for real or imaginary crimes « against the people, » brutally tortured and murdered in the so-called « popular tribunals » already made notorious in Communist China. As a reward for their complicity in these criminal proceedings, the former tenants, hired hands and poor small farmers would be given some of the land confiscated without remuneration from the big landlords.

This criminal technique is not the only sinister and subversive psychological method that the communists have used to mislead the peasants with false promises. Other ways are used to make merchants and civil servants as well as farmers partners in crime with the communists. The unreasonable hatreds and violent actions which are stirred up and perpetrated are then paid off with various forms of reward, such as rent control, abolition of usury, security of tenure and other legitimate reforms stolen by the communists from the land reform programmes of the free world. Most of the

farmers, of course, have no way of knowing that these reforms are all temporary at best and will be lost when the communists reach their ultimate goal of collectivization.

But in North Viet-Nam, despite all their attempts to conceal this ultimate goal of slave labour on government-owned farms, the Viet-Cong communists have failed to win the confidence of the people. This has been proved true through the recent peasant uprisings where the evil methods used by the communists are more responsible for their land reform failure than popular realization of false promises.

The Uprisings.

It is particularly significant that the most serious uprisings began in Nghe-An, for this over-populated, poverty-stricken, traditionally restless province is the birthplace of many revolutionaries, including Ho-Chi-Minh. Here and in the neighboring province of Ha-Tinh during the similar peasant uprisings against the French in 1930, the communist subversives attempted to set up the first « peasant soviets » in Indochina. They organized attacks against unpopular landlords and tried to break up large estates. There was great damage and brutality ; and French retribution was swift and cruel.

After the communists came into power they decided to try again. In December 1955, the Viet-Cong Ministry of Agriculture announced that its first two state farms had been opened in Nghe-An Province. « Other similar farms will be established later, » the announcement concluded. Speaking of them only a few days later, Radio Hanoi began to call these collective farms by their Russian Communist name : « kolkhoses. »

Now, less than a year later, two years after the Viet-Cong regime came into power and 26 years after the uprisings against the French, the same peasants of Nghe-An have had their fill of the new tyranny and have revolted as strongly as did their parents in 1930. Suppression by the Viet-Cong troops has been no even more swift and more cruel than before.

The Refugees.

As told by the most recent refugees from Nghe-An, the collective farms and other land reform failures were only part of the reason they revolted against and fled from the whole communist regime of tyranny, hunger and death. They had fought in ignorance of the rest of the world ; they had not even heard of the uprising in Hungary.

« We knew nothing of freedom in the South, » said a young man named Nguyen-Khai-Diem, one of a boatload of refugees who arrived at the seaport of Tourane on November 18th. « We did not know that the French had already left South Viet-Nam. They told us that here there was no food, that all the women had been forced to become prostitutes, and that the people made pies of the flesh of little children. We did not know, *but what we did know was that there was death up there in the North.* »

« We had long wanted to revolt, » said Nguyen-Khai-Diem. « But we started the revolution in earnest when we received the letter from Chairman Ho saying that freedom was being given back to the people, and we found out that it was not. »

Unlike the Hungarian patriots, who had also been given false promise of freedom by the Soviets and their puppet government in

Budapest, the Vietnamese peasants had no weapons. « How did you fight the Viet-Minh ? » Nguyen was asked. « First we used our hands ; then we used sticks and stones. »

The most serious revolts, according to Nguyen, were in the predominately Catholic area around Quynh-Luu, but other refugees told of similar uprisings in the suburbs of Hanoi itself, in Phat-Diem, Thanh-Hoa and Vinh — the principal birthplace of such revolutionaries as Ho-Chi-Minh himself. In many cases, Buddhist peasants were prevented from joining their compatriot Catholic rebels by the hasty deployment of the 304th Viet-Minh division under the notorious General Nguyen-Van-Quang, who was advised by a number of Chinese communist army officers.

The brutal use of military force described by these and other refugees was confirmed, as were other details of the uprisings, by both Hanoi Radio and the official newspaper of the Lao-Dong Workers' Party *Nhan-Dan*. The Viet Cong Government naturally tried to minimize the extent of the uprisings, just as it had previously tried to excuse the failures of the land reform programme by admitting that certain « mistakes » had been made. But the fact that these admissions were made at all betrayed how serious the situation was and continues to remain. Most important of all were the measures taken too late to prevent the uprisings, so that nothing was left but the use of force.

The Land Reform Purge.

The unsuccessful measures with which the Viet-Cong tried to appease the people are closely related but are best considered separately. They are, first, a purge of the land reform administration and, second, government promises of free elections and more civil rights.

The land reform purge began publicly when, on October 29, the Hanoi Radio announced bluntly that « mistakes » in the land reform programme were responsible for the dismissal of Truong-Chinh as Secretary General of the Lao-Dong Workers' Party and his replacement by none other than Ho-Chi-Minh himself.

The dismissal of Truong-Chinh (real name : Dang-Xuan-Khu) represents a set-back for the Viet-Cong pro-Chinese camp, which also includes the Premier and Foreign Minister Pham-Van-Dong, General Nguyen-Son, and others. Chinh's replacement by President Ho-Chi-Minh correspondingly represents a temporary victory by the pro-Soviet camp, which also includes General Vo-Nguyen-Giap, Minister of Defense and Commander-in-Chief of the Army, and Ton-Duc-Thang, President of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly.

The Truong-Chinh group originally came into its own with the organization of the Lao-Dong Party in 1950, when the Chinese communists conquered the mainland and enabled the Viet-Minh to occupy North Viet-Nam. Ho-Chi-Minh was made president of the new party, but Chinh with his Chinese backing was its real leader. However, subsequent pressure from Ho and his Soviet-trained group brought about an earlier purge in the Lao-Dong ranks in 1950. General Nguyen-Son, a Chinh supporter and Commander-in-Chief of Interzone Four, was demoted and forced to flee for his life to China. After the Geneva Armistice, General Son returned to Hanoi but on October 22, 1956, was secretly liquidated for good.

In the present purge Truong-Chinh himself has ostensibly been held « responsible for the mistakes of the agrarian reform. » Ho-Viet-Thang, last year's director of the agrarian reform policies, and Le-Van-Luong, the former director of the National Bank, have also been disciplined and demoted. Thang, who was directly responsible for the application of policy, was accused of committing « important errors » ; and Luong, who was responsible for the reorganization on the provincial level, was found guilty of « serious mistakes. »

None of these three men, however, was expelled from the party itself or really purged in the old-fashioned manner like General Nguyen-Son. Chinh was denoted from secretary general to the position of commissar in the Politburo Central Committee; Luong from Politburo commissar to deputy commissar; and Thang, who suffered the most, from the Politburo to ordinary party membership. Furthermore, the Director of the National Agrarian Reform Committee, Pham-Van-Dong, was not mentioned in the purge, although he belongs to Chinh's pro-Chinese faction. Chinh himself is only the assistant director of this Committee.

However sudden, the comparatively mild penalties inflicted upon these men suggest that Truong-Chinh particularly, because of his retention in the Politburo, may have agreed to play the role of scapegoat. In any case, they have been punished as much for their agrarian reform failures as their pro-Chinese tendencies.

In the eyes of Ho-Chi-Minh and his group, the Soviet influence is preferable to the Chinese not only on ideological grounds but because the USSR is much farther away from Viet-Nam and sends far fewer administrative officers to control and interfere with the government in Hanoi.

Disagreement between the pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese groups over agrarian reform had been mentioned before by Truong-Chinh who, as recently as October 23, apologized for errors in a speech before the Hanoi Youth Congress and promised immediate remedies. For months the official Lao-Dong newspaper, *Nhan-Dan*, and the Hanoi Radio had been publishing and broadcasting increasingly severe criticisms not only of official policies but also of inefficiency, mismanagement and corruption in their administration. Popular resentment among farmers has, by further confessions of the Viet-Cong, reached such proportions that radical steps were necessary to appease them.

According to a *Nhan-Dan* editorial of August 11, for example, the land reform cadres have failed to « recognize honestly and

sincerely that mistakes have been committed in the villages.» Despite « many concrete achievements » in land reform, « it has left many grave shortcomings which have impaired the very foundations of the party and have to some extent weakened the solidarity of the union in the countryside. »

Other comment, more specific and detailed, has pointed out that the cadres have been unnecessarily brutal and ruthless: Farmers only faintly suspected of reactionary tendencies have been harshly punished; religious freedoms have been abused, particularly in Catholic zones (such as Nghe-An); organizations of various types, especially youth groups, « unfairly » disbanded; and even old line Communist cadres have been preemptorily purged.

In none of these admissions of failure, however, is there any indication that the Viet-Cong has changed its basic land reform policies or its ultimate objective of collectivization. Failures in this respect were criticized more than three years earlier in a *Nhan-Dan* article: « Haste was made in grouping the farmers into collectives without giving them the time to adjust their consciences so as to become volunteers. The farmers, feeling forced to join the collectives, have shown no enthusiasm in the service of production. »

Truong-Chinh himself subsequently denounced the « left-wing deviationism » of certain party cadres who were blindly following Marxist principles ahead of official policy. Speaking before the first party congress in December 1953, he said: « The Central Executive Committee shall follow a well-defined plan whose execution shall be implemented in several stages. That is why the cadres, as well as the popular masses, shall not show impatience and shall not implement the agrarian reform according to their own whim. Therefore, the regions which have not received the authorization to mobilize the popular masses to carry out the reform are absolutely forbidden to do anything at all in that direction. »

This last reference to « left-wing deviationism » applies not to the pro-Soviet faction of Ho-Chi-Minh but to the third or so-called

pure Marxist camp, which has been accused by both pro-Chinese and pro-Soviet factions of Titoist tendencies. This group, headed by Tran-Van-Giau, is very small and some of its members, including Giau, were mildly purged after he returned from Yugoslavia and made speeches which were out of line with government policy. Like the pro-Chinese Ho-Viet-Thang, Giau was demoted to ordinary party membership, as were his fellow-Titoists, Dang-Thai-Mai and Ton-Quang-Phiet.

Thus the set-back suffered by Truong-Chinh and his pro-Chinese group is as much the result of factional disputes within the Viet-Cong hierarchy as of popular discontent over land reform failures. The « masses », however, may have gained a brief respite as a result of this much-publicized change in leadership.

But *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. For there are other Viet-Cong leaders to carry out the communist objectives under the over-all direction of Ho-Chi-Minh. And who knows ? Chinh himself may still be directing land reform operations from another, smaller, desk.

Civil Rights and Free Elections ?

Following the purge of land reform administrators, the Viet-Cong government called an extraordinary meeting of the Council of Ministers presided over by Ho-Chi-Minh. According to Radio Hanoi on November 2, it was decided at this meeting to hold elections in 1957 « enabling the people further to participate in the management of the State and control of the administration ». It was also decided :

1. « To readjust and develop the democratic organs of the people. »

2. Give more powers to the present puppet National Assembly « elected 10 years ago. »

3. « Ensure the people democratic rights and strengthen the basis of democratic legality, »

4. Pass new laws guaranteeing greater freedom of speech and movement.

5. Improvement of living conditions of workers through « a more reasonable wage system. »

These promised measures, whether they are carried out or not, reveal the same patterns of Viet-Cong failure as the land reform purge.

The Vietnamese people in the North are desperately weary of Communist oppression and corruption. By making new promises, the Hanoi government hopes to appease the people. But the new promises are as easy to make and break as have been other promises in the past.

The Viet-Cong government itself is exasperated by pressure and interference by Soviet and Chinese foreigners. In talking about individual rights and legislative independence they may really mean de-satellization. But the three factions in the Viet-Cong hierarchy cannot always agree among themselves whether the Russians or the Chinese are the greater threat to national independence.

The Viet-Cong is now on the defensive more than ever before, not only against Sino-Soviet interference, but because of the democratic progress and national independence in the free South. By talking of giving real power to the Hanoi parliament, holding really free elections, giving the people more freedom and workers better pay — they are preparing by propaganda for another bid for nationwide elections.

Their demand for such elections in July 1956 was refused by world opinion not only because the Government of the Republic of

Free Vietnam did not sign the Geneva Armistice in which the elections were mentioned, but because the Viet-Cong could not prove that the conditions necessary to free elections had been established in the North in accordance with the standards of the United Nations Organization.

Viet-Cong promises of individual human rights and free elections are to be welcomed, as is any lessening of Sino-Soviet interference. But the burden of the proof which remains with them is all the greater because of many similar deceptions in the past.

Conclusion.

The land reform programme, in any case, will almost certainly follow the Sino-Soviet example. By the time spring sowing starts in 1957, 90 per cent of China's 500 million peasants will have been persuaded or forced into collective farming units. In accordance with Mao-Tse-Tung's famous policy : « Go slow at first but fast at the end, » Peking has abandoned all pretense of deviating from Moscow's example. Private ownership of land has been « abolished forever. »

The peasant uprisings in North Vietnam seem to have convinced Ho-Chi-Minh and his cohorts to continue to « go-slow » for a while. Land reform failures in the revolutionary province of Nghe-An, where collective farms were twice started and have twice failed, have made this temporary policy all the more expedient.

But expediency in the form of more false « Land to the Tillers » promise is about all that our northern compatriots can hope for from the Viet-Cong. Sooner or later — unless freedom comes first — Uncle Ho will get the nod from Father Mao to go « fast-at-the-end. »